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Success, Achievement, Together...for All Students

May 3, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means  
Subject: Support & Fund HB 3236

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Gretchen Brunner, and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of School Improvement Services at the Willamette Education Service District (WESD). In this capacity I have been able to help build and grow the Willamette Career Academy (WCA) as the program's supervisor. I am here today to urge this committee to support HB 3236 and the potential of the students in our regional schools.

The WCA is not just another option for Career Technical Education. It is the work of more than 11 school districts, numerous business and industry partners, and private donors to provide high-quality options for students where districts may not have the funding or space to provide them by themselves. For the past four years, superintendents, principals, teachers, and staff from districts have partnered with the WESD to plan and open this innovative program to best serve students. The results of this work have been outstanding with students able to be employed right out of high school or moving on to the next step in their career journey.

In the WCA's first year, 97.6% of WCA students graduated on time, and the remainder were working on finalizing their fifth year compared to statewide data of 90% of Career Technical Education (CTE) completers graduating on time. CTE concentrators that graduate from an Oregon high school have higher annual earnings than their peers. **90% of students at the WCA plan on continuing in the career path of the program in which they participated and moving into high-wage and/or high-demand careers.**

The investment by our legislature in the WCA and CTE across the state provides access to expanded opportunities for Oregon's rural and underserved student populations. For example, **64% of students at the WCA identify themselves as Latinx, compared to 32% who identify as white.**

WCA facilitates innovative industry partnerships that break barriers for students entering the workforce. The WCA is poised to expand on its internship programming and has collaborated with Oregon's Bureau of Labor & Industries (BOLI) and others to provide students with employment opportunities that were not normally available to 16-18-year-old youth. Knife River, Pape Machinery, Freres Lumber, Salem Health, and MaPS Credit Union are just a few of the industry partners investing in WCA.

**Dave Novotney, Ph.D.**  
**Superintendent**



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The opportunity for financial support this project for the 2023-2025 biennium is an opportunity to invest in both education and Oregon's workforce. Currently, the 11 regional school districts partner to provide six state-of-the-art Career Technical Education programs for their students. This investment is not about a school, it is about a program that if supported, reaches students across three counties with programs that they otherwise would not have access to. It is about opportunity and access for students in our rural communities. This ask for funding supports schools in lowering costs to the districts thus allowing more of our underserved and underrepresented student populations access to this high-quality educational program.

**Prioritizing funding for the WCA and CTE in Oregon prioritizes Oregon's future.** Students thrive in an environment where they are hands-on and they learn skills that are essential for their careers and future. Their schools put them first by supporting this type of innovation. Prioritize students and their school districts by funding HB 3236.

Thank you for your support,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gretchen R. Brunner".

Gretchen Brunner  
Executive Director of School Improvement Services  
Willamette Education Service District

**Dave Novotney, Ph.D.**  
**Superintendent**



# Willamette Career Academy

## Supporting HB 3236

Providing Innovative Partnerships between Education & Industry



### Who We Are

The **Willamette Career Academy (WCA)** is harnessing the power of connection and collaboration and has become a successful regional hub for career/technical innovation. The program continues to grow and currently serves students and business partners in Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties.

Entering its second year, the WCA is now offering six different educational programs to help address the demand for highly-skilled workers in our region, as our invested industry partners requested. The educational programs are **Cosmetology, Health Services, PAPÉ Diesel Technology, Construction Technology, IT/Computer Science, and Freres Manufacturing Technology.**

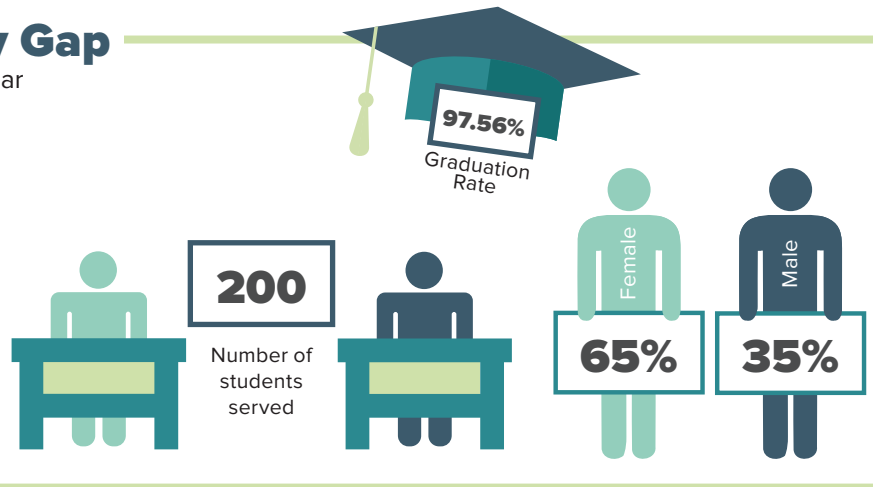
The Willamette ESD (WESD), representing the region's 21 school districts, has been operating the WCA and has plans for continuous improvement for the school's long-term success.

### Closing the Opportunity Gap

WCA Student Data for the 2021-22 School Year



- 55.9% BIPOC Total**
  - .4% African American
  - 1.3% Alaskan/Native American
  - 52% Hispanic
  - 1.3% Multi-Racial
  - .9% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 44.1% White Total**



### First Large Scale In-State Model of Regional Education

While other states have implemented regional career and technical center model, this project represents the first of its kind in Oregon. WESD is proud to demonstrate the value and viability of providing more opportunities and hands-on learning that students crave and industry demands.

**“Feeling that they were truly doing something positive for their futures!”**

~ WCA Students, when asked what they valued most from their experiences

### Project Costs

We'd like to ask the Oregon Legislature to commit \$2,850,000 dollars to the Willamette Career Academy for the 2023-25 biennium. This funding will provide operating costs, work-based learning, internships, apprenticeship opportunities, and access to high-quality educators to teach our students.

**Request: \$2,850,000 per Biennium**

# Regional Impact

District superintendents and school boards have fully committed to the WCA and have supported it during its first year of welcoming students. This state-of-the-art school prepares students for in-demand jobs in six popular programs and can also provide access to further education and training in those career pathways. This ongoing influx of highly skilled workers into our region will make our local counties more attractive to business and industry investments. The WCA plans to support over 450 students when operating at full capacity.

Industry partners have lined up with financial and programming support, demonstrating the urgent and intense need for skilled labor. Programs like the WCA showcase Oregon Legislators' commitment to career and technical education and providing the next-generation workforce that is desperately needed.

## Student Stories



**Isela Chavez Martinez**  
**WCA Cosmetology Student**  
 Isela plans on becoming a lash technician and eventually owning her own business. She was excited to attend WCA because she knew she would be able to pursue her future goals a lot sooner.



**Drew Kuenzi**  
**WCA Diesel Technology Student**  
 Drew's plans include becoming a certified Diesel Technician and owning a business. He is thankful for the staff who have helped him to develop his skills and pushed him to think about his future.

## Ongoing Needs

Discovered during the 2021-22



## Participating School Districts

All of our 21 regional partners have access to the WCA.

### Marion County School Districts

- Cascade School District
- Gervais Schools
- Jefferson School District
- Mt. Angel School District
- North Marion School District
- North Santiam School District
- Silver Falls School District
- St. Paul School District
- Woodburn School District

### Polk County School Districts

- Falls City School District

### Yamhill County School Districts

- Newberg School District

## Partners



Learn more at [www.willamettecareeracademy.com/regionalimpact](http://www.willamettecareeracademy.com/regionalimpact)